

Final Statement of Chair Brodeur

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have recently noted, “Sexual violence is a serious problem that can have lasting, harmful effects on victims and their family, friends, and communities.”

I believe the main task of the Commission was to analyze the possibility of creating a more effective tool for classifying offenders. It is important to note that during the time the Commission was deliberating, the Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB) did promulgate new regulations after an extensive process that included opportunities for interested parties to offer testimony at a public hearing. The new regulations recognize the need to apply rating factors that consider the offender’s age, gender, and disability. While I did not agree with the scope of the data collection proposal suggested by some commissioners, there are opportunities for data collection and analysis that will allow SORB to test the reliability of the new regulations over time. I believe the Commissioners were unanimous in their desire for the most accurate assessments possible. However, we disagreed on the methodology to pursue improved accuracy and the potential for developing a significantly better instrument.

Most importantly, the work of the Commission made clear to me the need to focus additional resources on primary prevention. Here is what we know:

- Sexual offenses are dramatically underreported. A 2013 report by the National Research Council indicates that 80 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to law enforcement, and other studies confirm the underreporting of sex crimes.
- Given this underreporting, it is very difficult to establish reliable recidivism rates.
- Among the reasons cited for underreporting are the following:
 - Self-blame or guilt;
 - Shame/embarrassment/desire to keep the incident a private matter;
 - Fear of the perpetrator;
 - Fear of not being believed or being blamed for being complicit in the incident;
 - Lack of trust in the criminal justice system.
- Checking the sex offender registry or conducting a criminal background check does not guarantee that a person will not sexually offend. Relying solely on these resources can provide a false sense of security.
- The concept of “stranger danger” is misleading. Most victims of a sex crime know the perpetrator.

The Sex Offender Registry Board focuses on a small group – convicted perpetrators. The most important public policy steps we can take lie in the areas of primary prevention and survivor support. This includes building on our efforts to empower survivors to report incidents without judgment and to improve access to services and supports. Regarding prevention, the CDC has identified three evidence-based prevention programs deemed to be effective after rigorous methodology analysis and three pilot programs. The Commonwealth will improve the lives of survivors and their families by supporting implementation and expansion of programs using the principles of effective prevention of sexual violence. In addition, by improving reporting, we will get better data on the scope of the problem and be better equipped to address recidivism.

I would like to thank all of the Commissioners, other presenters and interested parties for their work on this Commission. While we did not arrive at a consensus on a range of issues considered by the membership, I was impressed by each Commissioner's commitment to public safety.